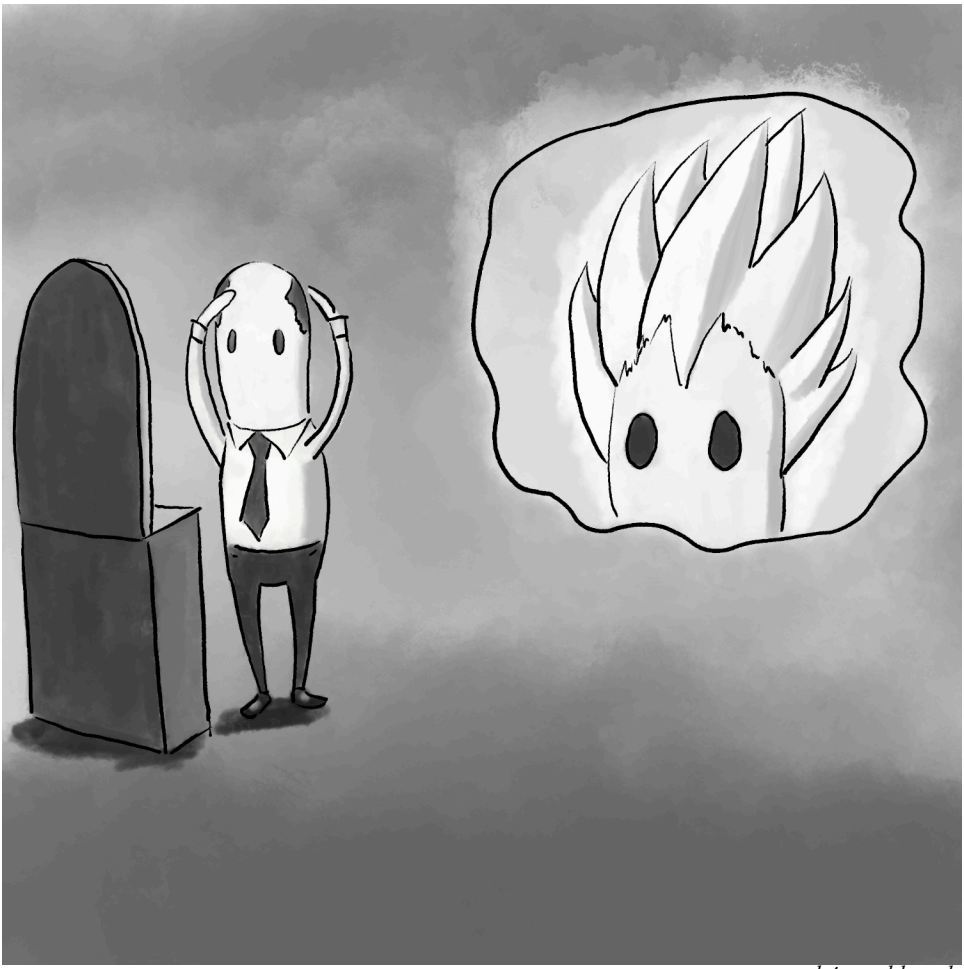
t He

Fantastic



andrés maldonado

art_irl [4] **winter /**

“the fantastic” **4.5.2025**

r chou [p. 20]

g cullen

j eppes

m eppes

y fahmy

h hardy

j kocsis

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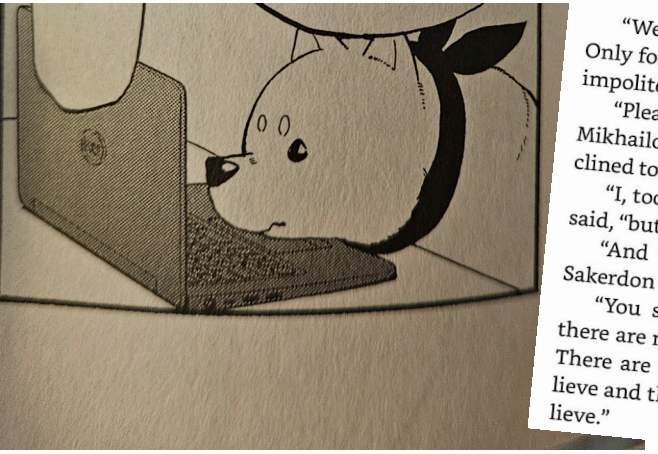
t simpson

l wanta

The problem with the real world, frankly, is that it is the only one we have.

These are naturally only fantasies. Actual reality is always completely different and destroys a good many fantasies. And so I must honestly confess that I really don't wish very strongly for the perpetuum to become practically usable. Praxis would destroy many of my fantasies. This I know with certainty.



"Well alright," I said, "let's drop it. Only forgive me for asking you such an impolite and tactless question."

"Please," said Sakerdon Mikhailovich. "After all, I simply declined to answer you."

"I, too, would not have answered," I said, "but for a different reason."

"And what would that be?" asked Sakerdon Mikhailovich indifferently.

"You see," I said, "in my opinion, there are no believers or non-believers. There are only those who want to believe and those who do not want to believe."

Transmutation of The Base

KATELYN MACKENZIE

Materials:
1 candle
37 gallons water
2 cups epsom salt
Solo cup
washcloth
lighter or matches

Directions:
1. To a bathtub, add water, warmed to 105° F. Add salt and stir to dissolve. Fill cup with 12 ounces cool water, approximately 68° F; add washcloth and let stand.

2. Light candle and turn off other lights. Disrobe and lower body into bathtub until fully submerged. Let rest until thoughts cease, about 20 minutes. Allow heat of water to agitate the body and ceasing of thoughts to agitate the mind.

3. Discomfort may be expected. Remove saturated washcloth from cup, wringing out half of the water back into the cup. Squeeze the rest of the cool water from the washcloth onto the arms, head, face, neck, and chest until soothed.

4. While simultaneously unzipping and levitating, allow affective material to rise. Discomfort is likely to increase. Bloom the emotions in water.

5. Repeat steps 3–4 as needed, until ready.

6. Locate desire from beyond bloomed affective material. Using desire, shape material into fantasy. (Allow the body its glossolalia during this step.) Remain in reverie until it culminates; withhold judgment; fantasize, if that's where desire wants to go.

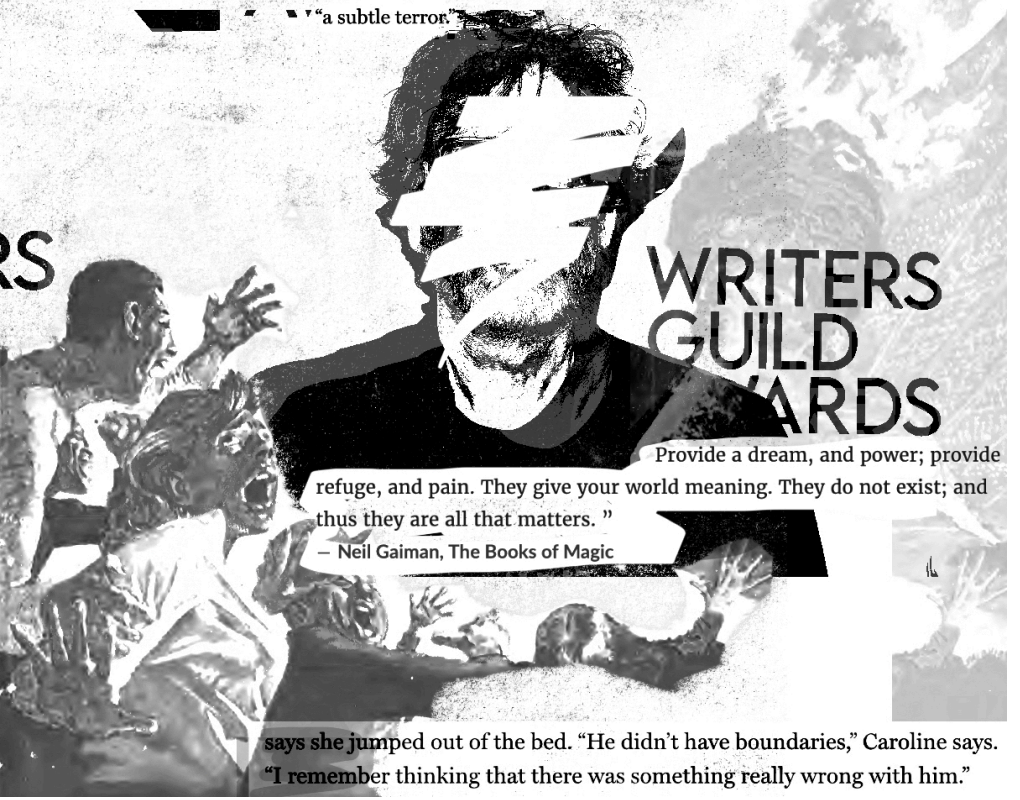
7. Once the fantasy departs, observe the remainder of the affective material in quantity and quality. Unfold and let rest. When complete, drain water, extinguish candle, and seek wind.

"There are only two worlds - your world, which is the real world, and other worlds, the fantasy. Worlds like this are worlds of the human imagination: their reality, or lack of reality, is not important.

to him — the magical spell of his interest in her individuality — vanished. "He seemed to have a script," she tells me. "He wanted me to call him 'master' immediately." He demanded that she promise him her soul. "It was like he'd gone into this ritual that had nothing to do with me."

What is important is that they are there. these worlds provide an alternative. Provide an escape. Provide a threat.

He looked at her again and said, "Don't ruin the moment." She did as instructed, and he began to stroke her feet. At that point, she recalls, she felt "a subtle terror."



Provide a dream, and power; provide refuge, and pain. They give your world meaning. They do not exist; and thus they are all that matters. "

— Neil Gaiman, The Books of Magic

says she jumped out of the bed. "He didn't have boundaries," Caroline says. "I remember thinking that there was something really wrong with him."

MARIAH EPPES

BLACK.

A voice.

V.O.
I was in an open space.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD - DAY.

Long grass blowing. But wait: the sky. Is it red?

V.O.
I couldn't remember how I got there.

CUT TO:

Red sky, streaks of darker maroon. Clouds, looking frozen. Pan down, it's the long grass again. Rippling.

V.O.
But it was beautiful.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Close on a woman's face, three-quarter view. She's looking ahead of her, distractedly, but gravely. This is CARRIE. The owner of the voice.

WIDE SHOT – CARRIE and another woman are seated across from each other at a kitchen table. Between them is a window over a kitchen sink. Out the window is a normal—too normal—suburban scene. The second woman, NICOLE, clears her throat.

NICOLE
(*sipping coffee*)
Weird dream.

CARRIE

Yeah. But—

NICOLE sips again. It's too loud; an interruption.

NICOLE

I had a dream I was in an elevator, and then my boss got in, pressed all the buttons, and left. I was mad her, so that's probably–

CARRIE

—I don't think this was a dream.

The same WIDE SHOT, window in the background. Too-normal life. NICOLE looks at CARRIE. Expectant silence.

CARRIE

It doesn't feel like I woke up. It feels like I… forgot. Like a memory, like something you know happened. You remember pieces, but the rest…

CARRIE turns to her left, toward the window.

The WIDE SHOT. Except now, the world out the window has been replaced by that brilliant red sky. The frozen clouds, the rippling grass.

CUT TO:

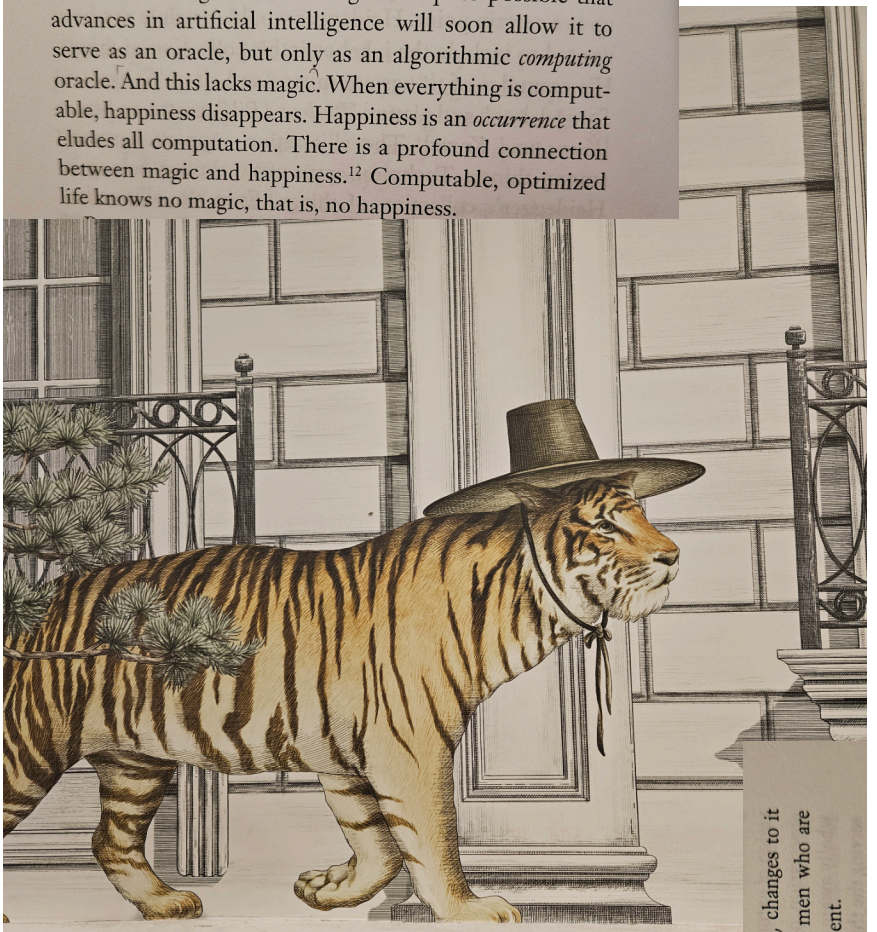
NICOLE, still looking at CARRIE. Then NICOLE turns to her right.

The WIDE SHOT. The usual scene has returned: the normal neighborhood, its expected colors, its manicured lawns.

NICOLE

You shouldn't drink caffeine before bed. I quit, and I feel much better.

Amazon's Alexa is not an automaton but an informaton. It lacks the magic of the thing. It is quite possible that advances in artificial intelligence will soon allow it to serve as an oracle, but only as an algorithmic *computing* oracle. And this lacks magic. When everything is computable, happiness disappears. Happiness is an *occurrence* that eludes all computation. There is a profound connection between magic and happiness.[12] Computable, optimized life knows no magic, that is, no happiness.



Fantasy is a literature particularly useful for embodying and examining the real difference between good and evil. In an America where our reality may seem to have been degraded to posturing patriotism and self-righteous brutality, imaginative literature continues to question what heroism is, to examine the roots of power, and to offer moral alternatives. Imagination is the instrument of ethics. There are many metaphors beside battle, many choices besides war, and most ways of doing right do not, in fact, involve killing anybody. Fantasy is good at thinking about those other ways. Could we assume, for a change, that it does so?

33 The world is a body common to all men, changes to it bring about a change in the souls of all men who are turned towards that part of it at that moment.

Ode to the Corpse Flower

HEATHER HARDY

anticipation building
with each passing minute
spent awaiting a whiff

inflorescence spotted
a humid embrace
next in line
yes! it's my turn!

pivotal moment
nose deep in the fold

(sniff)

senses searching
rotten meat?
potent cheese?
decomposed flesh?
strangers discuss,

elated by the repulsive delight
of this stinking wonder
a reminder that we live
on a fantastic planet

From BAGS
Propagation Greenhouses!

On Being The Author

JULIA EPPES

Fantasy has figured strongly in my childhood and in my adulthood. It has been cherished, abhorred, and ultimately accepted. I've circled around to the embracing part.

As a child—as it is for many children—it was my treasure; a solace, a place to live. My favorite place to be was in my imagination. Outside was threatening, somewhere I was always uncomfortable. The room my sister and I shared was the exception. Our childhood years were defined by creating characters and stories. We looked at each other and cried when a real cat arrived; it would mean neglecting our stuffed dogs. We were good at constructing our own worlds.

As a young adult, I resented fantasy. Resentment grew to loathing. The basis for this loathing was that I had grown up in fantasy, which was the cause of my ineffectuality in navigating the real world. I went on a crusade against fantasy and all forms of creativity. It wasn't real, so it was worthless. I wasn't real, so I was worthless. I threw myself into physical labor; by touching real things, I could become real. I was also becoming very thin. And ironically, I was falling into a far more pervasive fantasy than drawing a picture or watching a cartoon or playing a video game.

What is fantasy? What is reality? What if your reality becomes a fantasy? If your fantasy becomes a reality? Clinically, I was having trouble with the difference.

There was a series of (admittedly still unusual) coincidences. A story I had written in adolescence seemed to come true; I found myself surrounded by a group of people I had seemingly predicted—that I already knew. The conclusion that arrived in my mind was the sinking sense that I was eternal and somehow authored my own existence, knowing the story because I had already lived it, wrote it down as a youth because it was familiar from the future.

Upon reflection, some aspects are humorous in their absurdity—particularly amusing in retrospect was feeling some sort of overwhelming spiritual significance from a pop song. Driving, I heard a song on the radio: *I'm waking up/I feel it in my bones.* The song sounded so familiar. I nearly remembered it. It hurt, but it also felt like the edge of ecstasy. Eternal. It was as if I had heard it when I was young, as if I written it; it felt like I was the mind behind these lyrics. Of course it would be playing

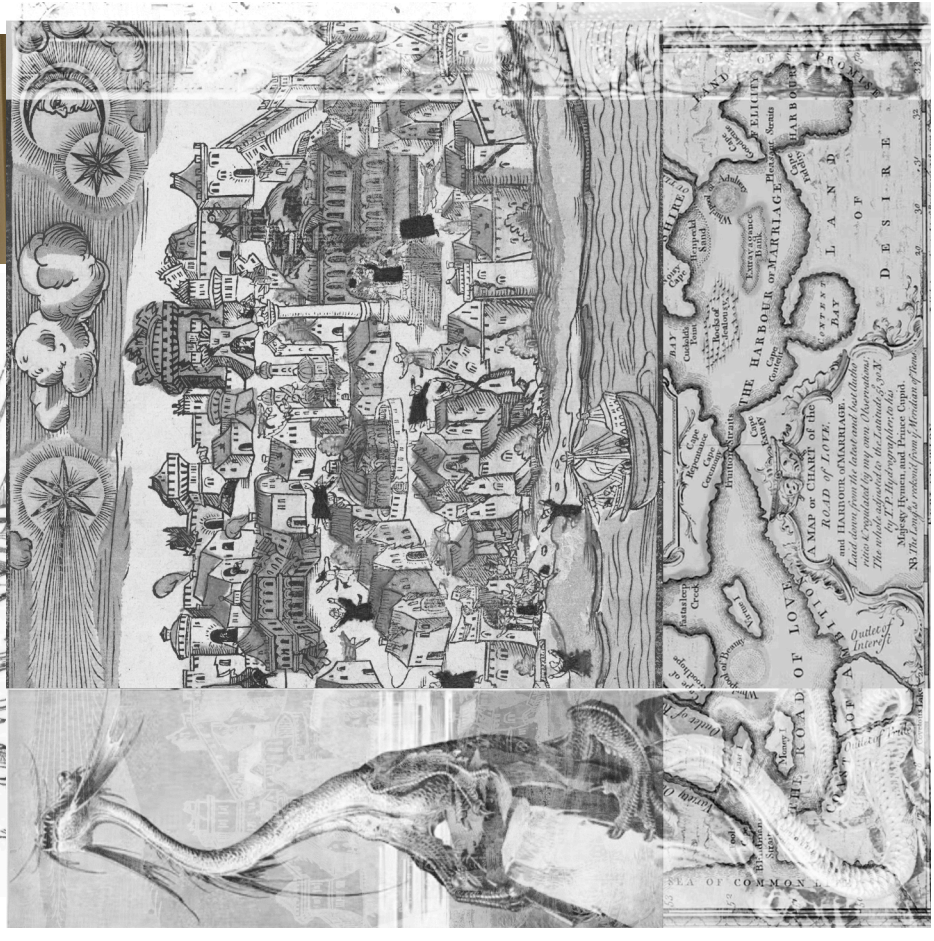
now, at this moment. That's because I was past and future, and because somehow, I had created it. Or at least it really, really felt like it.

My life became a cosmic drama. Good versus evil and all that. Whether I was angel or demon depended on my mood. Eventually, I settled on the conclusion that I was a very bad person.

Coincidentally, the song came on while we watched music videos in the hospital. I watched for seven days as the world was created again right in front of me. On the first day He created light. On the second day He imagined dragons. The spell was broken.

Despite my rejection of fantasy, fantasy encompassed me. My tendency to fantasy could not be escaped. The sense that I was the divine author of my own life was a confrontation with my own creativity, and perhaps that ubiquitous sense of fear came from somewhere—it can be scary to be in control of your life. Significantly, I wasn't assuming that I was the agent who found what I was looking for in life. That I was directing my own destiny. Is it so odd to seek something familiar? Someone you identify with? I see my experience now as a distorted expression of grappling with developing my own autonomy. And though it was a fantasy, it was true. I am the author of my own story.

The fantastic is the affect generated as we read by the direct reversal of the ground rules of the narrative world. Fantasy is that class of works which uses the fantastic exhaustively. One could not use the fantastic exclusively, since then there would be only reversal and no ground rules; so Fantasies must give some minimal sense of continuity, of reality. This conclusion accords well with our earlier observation that even the most realistic narratives must be fantastic to some minimal extent. Ob-



Family Leave in Fairyland

GWEN CULLEN

When I was in eighth grade, I wrote a novel about my life as Queen of Fairyland, an alternate dimension peopled by human-sized, winged Fairies and subspecies. It was derivative of high fantasy I liked, but even more derivative of my first middle school love, The West Wing. *The Queen of Fairyland dealt distractedly with magical foes and* at length *with Parliament on tax and energy policy. A key plot point turns on misappropriated government research grants. I spent a lot of time in Fairyland to cope with the upheaval that adolescence was for me. Now that I've had a baby, I've gone back.*

Like other winged things, Fairies hatch from eggs. That shell is the first hint you get about your child. I spend hours staring at my baby's, a warm cream color, stroking the constellation of ox-blood speckles running from pole to pole. I dig out the royal oomancy guide, a hundred years old and cracked in the binding. Do the spots form a serpent, indicating adaptability and discernment? Or more like a wave, meaning he'll be powerful but susceptible to mental problems? A flock of sparrows? I put the guide back.

He breaks through his shell over eighteen hours.

"It seems like we should just give him a hand," I joke with the royal doctors around 5 p.m., when the sky is still blue and I am not scared.

"Can you please explain again, exactly, why we can't give him a hand?" I am demanding by 4 a.m. Shell shards form a ring around the half-sprung egg. Through the little rips in the vitelline, I can see him churning, tiring. And then, in what seems instantaneous after the long wait, he shifts free of the cleaved shell. For a moment, he is a cubist baby, limbs stacked impossibly into each other, and then he unfurls, sucks a breath, and cries out. It's like he sucked the air straight from me. I hold him on my chest for six hours, dribbling the sugar, vitamin, and blood mix baby Fairies eat into his tiny mouth, beak already beginning to dry to be shed. When he blinks, I think that his eyes are a secret color only he and I will know, a color that's never existed before in nature. It's just deep blue. I do not feel the time pass.

Unlike their human counterparts, Fairy babies have not spent nine months in the womb, undergoing circadian indoctrination. Most do not sleep at all for the first two weeks. Sleep is a skill they must be taught. In order to reduce the significant risks addled parents can pose to unsleeping infants, Fairyland has a strong program of neonatal support. A corps of night nurses dispatch a professional to come up to five nights a week the first month, three the second, to keep watch and train the parents in techniques to coax an infant Fairy to sleep. There are 24-hour centers next to the grocery store where you can go when you feel crazy, let your baby toss and turn and hover as they wrestle their brains. You can talk with the other parents, laugh thinly about how you somehow thought you would be okay, that this wouldn't be so bad for you. Everyone repeats the same, possibly apocryphal fact about this horrible sleep habit being the origin of the now-shamed Fairy practice of dropping off changelings at human houses, stealing away with the baby who can sleep, hoping the human mother will care for ours in their stead.

"Are his wings okay?" I ask the king consort for the twelfth time.

"They're fine."

"You didn't even look."

"I looked this morning."

"Yeah, it's different now. There's this crust. I'm worried the pocket is infected."

"So exactly like this morning."

"There's more now."

"Well, it's still eczema."

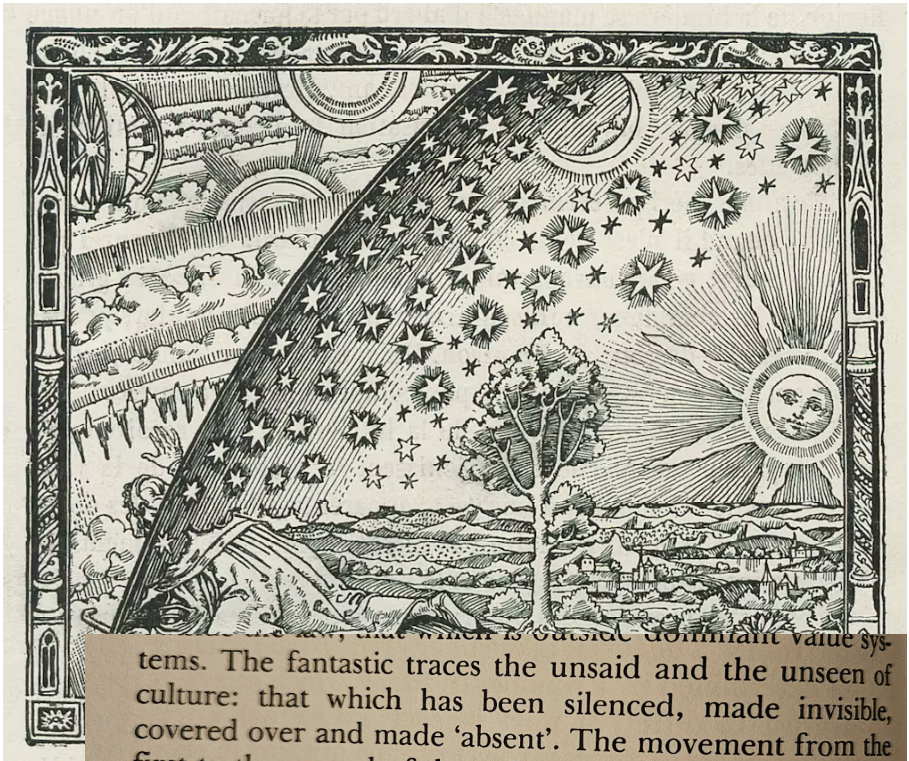
I apply more scent-free, dye-free lotion. Then I pick at the flakes, until I force a big, scaly one loose and he starts to cry. Now I really get into it with the king consort, snap that he doesn't need to be so dismissive, that he doesn't know everything about babies just because he has a lot of cousins.

The king consort hits a wall around week seven. He's been trying to cover more nights, knowing I need to remain cogent for essential briefings. But he's turning grey and so I order him to bed, assure him my ladies-in-waiting and I've got it. I read too much (i.e., anything) about positional asphyxiation and am afraid to put the prince in his carrier. I clutch him to my shoulder as I wander around the gardens, trailed by my ladies.

They all have older kids. "You won't remember this," they promise. I won't pretend this isn't soothing, weirdly, but there's a pang, too. I realize

that I will forget many moments of his life, and that feels sacrilegious, careless handling of a miracle. I watch him watching the trees—the shimmering golden firs of Ruvuun, the pendulous purple blossoms of the draping liop bushes, a white skinned sycamore stolen from Earth. Why am I trying so hard to remember? If he asks me one day, *did we see this? Did this happen?* Why is it so important to me that I will always be able to assure him *yes, it did happen, just like that. I was there*?

I take the same eight-month leave all parents in Fairyland are afforded, but it seems impolitic to take more. There are bills that have been languishing on my desk, dignitaries whose visits are overdue. I interview twelve candidates to be the royal nanny. We tour a daycare in Lubrun, where the prince could learn simple songs and fingerpaint with the children of Fairyland's elite. To make a misguided, bluffing point, I tour a normal daycare, too. The night before the nanny starts, I sob in the shower. *What is the point of being queen if I have to go back to work and leave my baby with a stranger?* After two days at work, I feel like me again. The royal nanny brings my son to me each time he wakes up from his now-regular naps and I hug his chubby shoulders and whisper into the top of his head that I love him, love him, love him. I go back to work and feel guilty and focused and full.


tems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of
culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible,
covered over and made 'absent'. The movement from the

YASMEEN FAHMY

Emerald green lace hanging again and again in every direction so that as I move through the room, what ought to have been a room, I feel I might uncover a person, startled as I am, that I've caught them dressing. Chantilly, bobbin, guipure, knotted, knitted, on and on. Where is the floor? The door? The pesky straw-furred cat that led me into this silk hellscape? And how might I leave? I would very much like to leave.

From my left comes the clunk of heel on hardwood; someone's found the footing I cannot, and it seems they're headed this way. "Is someone there?" I ask so pitifully the last word drops to nowhere. I grasp at a beaded bunch desperately, art deco embroidery presses into my palm; a flimsy anchor for a man on the verge of vomiting.

My breath shoots in at the sight of a hand there, suddenly, curling over pleated trim and peeling the fabric away. I must've looked ghastly, clawing at their delicate embellishments like an animal. "You're a bit lost aren't you?" comes the voice, smooth as egg yolk. Before my stammering starts they're under my arm and around my back. "Hold on to me." Then, in a blink, there's the ground, and I heave violently. The stranger is kind enough to keep me upright through it. My fingers dig into something and I'm vaguely aware I must be hurting them.

"You followed Antony," they say plainly to more of my retching.

"What?" I barely manage, eyes squeezed shut. I sound insolent. I heave again, then moan when nothing comes. A consoling sigh floats by my ear. It occurs to me suddenly how wet I must be against their clothes; sweat, drool, God knows what else. But pulling away, my legs buckle like snapped banana stems.

"Better to sit a while," they mumble, guiding me somewhere. It feels like a wooden bench and I thank the heavens. Is there anything sturdier, more unyielding? They linger a moment, breath warming my ear, then slip away without a word.

The choice to be absolutely still is a balm. I don't move for some time, not until my body sends away the heat of vertigo, and sweat settles into stickiness, and quiet, easy breath returns. When my eyes flicker open at last, I'm relieved to see a textured red rug sprawled over slatted wood floors. Not a lick of green in sight.

My gaze floats up and I realize they're a man, or look to be; about my age and height, embarrassingly. He's gone and sat at a loom and he's working with such focus you'd think he'd been there ages. "Would you like some water?" he asks, as if to the air and walls. "Yes," I muster. He all but glances at a pitcher nearby, which proceeds to pour its contents into a stout peach-colored glass. Some part of me notes this, but I'm too parched to fuss. I fetch the glass and find a seat on a tufted ottoman a few steps away. He glances at me expectantly, passing the shuttle beneath unwoven threads, then back again.

"Did someone drug me?" I finally ask, stupidly.

His eyebrows float up. "You've never followed a perciple before." That flat tone again. His gray-brown irises hold my gaze, crinkle with amusement when I just stare back.

"Perciples open doorways, mostly for other spellfolk, but every now and then they'll let a struggling human in. Invite some wonder back into their life." Is that what that was? Wonder?

"I'm sorry you landed among my threadwares, supply for my shop. It's difficult to navigate with no orienter. So much fabric, even I get lost sometimes." When he smiles I see two rows of bottom teeth, the second sharper than the first. His lips close quickly, registering my dismay.

"You're free to leave whenever you like." He speaks away from me now, toward the fabric forming. "Take this corridor." He nods toward the opposite wall. "Two windows down and turn right. There will be a door that opens wherever it was you entered." The rhythmic hum of weaving returns.

I set the glass down and, after a moment, notice the rich tapestries draped across nearly every inch of the workshop. Waves of peach, periwinkle, sage, hues of citrus and ember bathed in sunlight. My eyes float along, and eventually linger on a quilt unfurled close by; a soothing blend of orange, cinnamon, and lavender with small cross stitches of cherry red. As if by gust of wind, I drift over. Then, for reasons I can't explain, I say:

"There's a shop in the Garment District I pass a lot; Mood Fabrics on 37th. I went in last weekend." My fingers press against the vibrant red stitching and it presses back, as though alive. "I don't own a sewing machine and I don't know how to sew, and I don't know what I'd make if I did… but it felt good to be in there, watching others measure, cut, talk about their ideas."

When I trail off I realize two things: first, that the needlework reminds

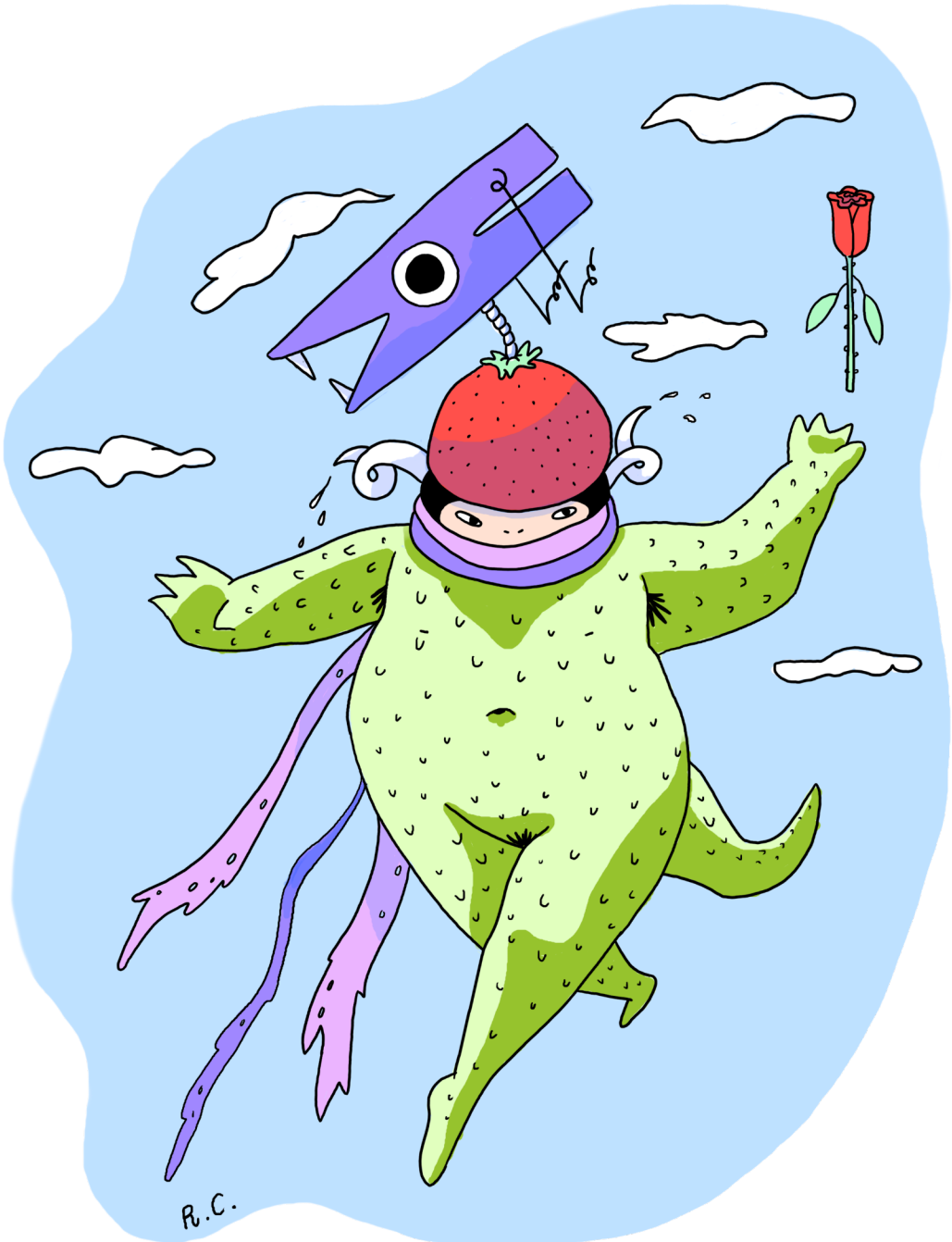
me of a bear I used to adore as a child, and second, that I'm about to cry. And then I do cry, in that quiet way that comes when you've forgotten you're a feeling thing for too long. The tears slip silently down my cheeks and settle into the quilt. Its colors swirl together and look even more beautiful.

After a moment, his footsteps arrive at my side. He speaks, gentler than before. "We're not always dealt a fair hand." He holds the quilt's trim as if considering it. "Sometimes all you can do is wander into a fabric shop."

I press a forearm against my damp chin, suddenly self-conscious. Then decide it doesn't matter. When I face him again he's smiling softly, first at his work and then at me.

"Would you like it?" he asks. "The quilt?"

"That would be wonderful," I whisper.


R.C.

A Sweet, Sweet Fantasy

JULIE KOCSIS

"So, I guess we just make sure no one spikes the punchbowl?" Maya said to the woman next to her.

"Yeah, pretty much. And make sure no one dies," Leslie replied.

"Got it."

The two women, both in their mid-40s, stood with their backs against a beige-painted cinderblock wall in the Washington Middle School gymnasium. A snack table a few feet away was scattered with bowls of off-brand chips and cookies, a big bowl of red punch with a ladle and some ice floating it, and C-fold paper towels and paper plates from the cafeteria. The leftover smell of French fries and chicken nuggets from lunch mingled with the scent of sweaty gym socks and expensive cologne that a few of the boys borrowed from their dads. A few strands of twisted crepe paper were hung on the walls and a too-small disco ball spun slowly from the ceiling.

"I'm Leslie, Ava's mom," Leslie said, pointing to a young girl across the gym from them.

"Of course, of course! I'm her science teacher, Maya," Maya replied, shaking Leslie's hand.

"Yeah, I remember you from Back to School Night! Ava loves your class."

"She's a good kid."

"That's nice of you to say."

The dance music slowly faded out as a man in an ill-fitting short sleeved button-down shirt slowly clicked the Volume Down button on his iPhone, which was plugged into a couple of big speakers. This was the extent of "DJ equipment" that the middle school could afford. It didn't really matter much anyway, though, since no one was dancing, except for a couple girls in the corner, in their own little world, filming a viral dance to another song entirely.

"Heyyyy kids, hope you're having fun tonight. You might know me as Mr. Morris, but tonight you can call me DJ Funky Frank!" he said into a microphone to absolutely no reaction from the students, except some blank stares and a single cough that pierced the silence. "…But enough about me, let's get back to those cool tunes… *man*…," he said, fumbling

around with his iPhone and quickly hitting Play.

"Rough gig," Maya commented.

Leslie grimaced. "Were we really this awkward at that age?" she said, surveying the room, which was divided into two groups: boys on one side of the gym, girls on the other.

"Oh, we absolutely were. That's what all those teen movies and shows get wrong today. The confidence level. No 13-year-old is *that* sure of themselves."

"Of course, if they made shows about how kids *actually* are, who would watch?"

"True. I'm having a hard time even chaperoning this dance. It's kind of painful."

"I remember my first school dance. I put on loads of eye makeup and a crop top my mom made me change out of before she'd let me leave the house."

"I wanted to dye my hair bright blue like Gwen Stefani. That never happened. I'll have to remember to thank my parents for that someday."

"DJ Funky Frank back here! How come no one's dancing? What do you guys listen to?"

"How 'bout some Travis Scott? Some Lil Baby?" one tall, blond-haired boy who'd clearly started going through puberty before some of his much shorter friends, shouted to Frank.

"…I'm not familiar with those names, but here's some Mumford & Sons to listen to while I check out some of Little Baby's lyrics first," he said as banjo music started to play and the tall blond kid audibly groaned.

"It's funny how you can immediately tell who the popular kids are," Leslie commented to Maya.

"I guess *some* of them are confident. Covid and social media haven't totally messed up all of them."

"Just most of them," Leslie said.

As the night (well, early evening—this *is* middle school after all) wore on, significant flop sweat started to dot DJ Funky Frank's forehead.

"Unfortunately, none of Little Baby's lyrics are suitable for a school event, so… here's Coldplay," he announced.

"*Boooooooo*!" The group of boys was turning openly hostile.

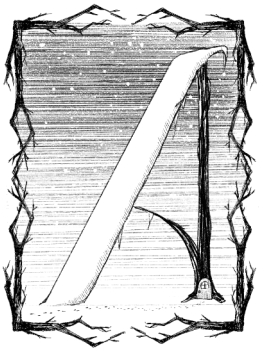
The tall blond kid spoke up again, "Isn't there *something* dope you can

play, bruh?"

"Mariah!" Leslie found herself shouting out loud into the silent room from her spot next to the punchbowl at the back of the gym. It was an out-of-body experience. *Whose voice was that?* she even wondered at first. She was never the loud one, never a party-starter. As if on cue, every single head turned in silence to look at the source of the voice.

Figuring she might as well go with it, she added "'Fantasy!'… By Mariah Carey!… Please!"

With a shrug and a few taps on his iPhone, Frank cued up the hit song from 1995 and cranked the volume to 11. And that evening, in that middle school gymnasium, with those two groups of students divided by gender, a miracle happened. First, slowly, the tall blond boy nodded his head to the beat. Then a couple girls started shaking their hips. By the time Mariah belted the chorus, "It's just a sweet, sweet fantasy, baby," even Funky Frank was throwing his arms up. Leslie and Maya, not wanting to be left out, despite their lame Gen X status, tapped their toes and sang along. After "Fantasy," Spotify guided Funky Frank right into a '90s R&B/hip-hop playlist that was miraculously beloved by all. The boys mixed with the girls and kept dancing until the break of dawn. Or at least until their parents drove up to the school in minivans to take them home.



Whimsical Old Woman Hood

winter vignette

TORI SIMPSON & LORA WANTA

The old woman opened her eyes to a telltale stark brightness coming from her bedroom window. Excited, she tottered out of bed and peered through the paned glass.

Snow blanketed her vast backyard garden in sparkling, soft sheets. Dainty flakes floated down peacefully from the sky, as if suspended in time. Glistening icicles lined the window she gazed out of and created the perfect frame for the light, magical spectacle before her. Where in the warmer parts of the year her garden flourished with vibrant flora and fauna, it had now become a gleaming wonderland of icy crystals.

Eager to embrace the first snow, she gathered the impressive mound of handmade multi-colored sweaters that had been piling up in her home since she'd started knitting them a couple of months ago. She knew her backyard friends well, and had made a custom sweater for each one, taking careful account of the types of beings who would wear them. Gnomes couldn't fit into fairy-sized sweaters, after all! And they certainly didn't need holes in the backs for wings.

After quickly wrapping herself up in her own handmade warm clothes, she went downstairs and out the back door, myriad sweaters clutched to her chest. At the sight of her with arms full of their cozy clothing, the magical creatures paused their snowy games and all gathered ‘round as the old woman sat on her favorite stone bench in the middle of the garden. One by one she passed the garment gifts out, receiving thank-yous in the forms of sweet, small kisses, shin hugs, and a preserved rose from the sprite who tended the thorny rose bush. Pretty soon the backyard haven was awash with a fuzzy spectrum of colors against the scene of wintry white.

But perhaps the most special gift of all was that the brownies had turned her backyard into a snow-sculpture garden.

She walked up to the nearest group of the little ones (for they were spread about the entire backyard, filling it to the brim with their masterpieces) and admired their handiworks still in progress. She saw all kinds of magnificent art: a fairy perching atop a robin's nest, a frog leaping from a lily pad, and the dryad lovingly embracing her willow tree to stave off the cold (the latter of which the old woman saw with a glance towards the back of the garden had been inspired in real time as the dryad was, in fact, hugging her sylvan companion).

Then another sculpture caught her eye. Upon closer inspection she realized with a delighted laugh that it was a life-size rendering of herself, holding a basket of vegetables. The brownies had perfectly captured her deep wrinkles, her curly and thinning hair, and her mismatched clothes. But it was missing one thing…

The old woman unwrapped the bright purple scarf from around her neck and placed it on her frosty twin. Though her favorite time of year was in the late spring when flowers flourished and trees towered tall, she wished she could stay in this moment forever, surrounded by her magical menagerie of friends as the falling snow blanketed them in the sparkling sunlight.

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further reading:

p. 5 / "there is no safe word" by lila shapiro, new york magazine

p. 10 / https://www.bbg.org/article/a_rare_corpse_flower_blooms

ordinary unhappiness #80: on fantasy feat. jordan stein [podcast]

the ezra klein show: a legendary world-builder on multiverses, revolution and the "souls" of cities [podcast]

image sources:

grace street, 17 w. 32nd st, ny, ny / wall art

designs from kimono pattern books (ca. 1902)

mattia giegher's *treatise on napkin folding* (1629)

wari tie-dye textiles (ca. 425–1100)

anton seder's *the animal in decorative art* (1896)

celestial phenomena in 16th-century germany (broadsheet)

the "flammarion engraving" (ca. 1888)

thomas sayer's "a map or chart of the road of love, and harbour of marriage" (1748)

fantasy & science fiction vol. 33, no. 1 (jul. 1967)

jamie mccarthy/getty images for writers guild of america east

life magazine, 11/02/1911; 11/09/1911; 12/07/1911

text sources:

p. 3 / *daemons of the shadow realm*, vol. 6 by hiromu arakawa

p. 8 / *non-things* by byung-chul han

p. 3 / "the old woman" by daniil kharms

p. 16 / *fantasy: the literature of subversion* by rosemary jackson

p. 8 / "assumptions about fantasy" by ursula k . le guin

p. 8 / *the waste books* by g. c. lichtenberg

p. 2 + p. 13 / *fantastic worlds* edited by eric rabkin

p. 3 / *the perpetual motion machine* by paul scheerbart

cover image sources:

fantasy & science fiction vol. 8, no. 1 (jan. 1955)

fantasy & science fiction vol. 26, no. 6 (jun. 1964)

fantasy & science fiction vol. 37, no. 4 (oct. 1969)

ferdinand van kessel's four parts of the world (ca. 1689)

how to print & bind this zine at home:

materials, programs, tools:

- 8 sheets of regular printer paper
- 3-4 new staples
- a pushpin, awl, or other tool to make a small hole
- adobe acrobat reader (free) or other PDF reader that can print in "booklet" mode
- optional: an x-acto knife, to trim the edges

instructions:

- open the zine PDF in acrobat. go to file > print. under "page sizing and handling," choose "booklet."
- the zine will appear to print in a jumbled-up way. take the sheets from the printer in exactly the order they were printed. if you fold the whole stack in half, you'll notice that the pages are in order. don't fold it yet, though!
- being careful to keep the sheets in order, fold each page individually (to get the best crease). you can use the blunt edge of a butter knife or a bone folder to crease it well.
- now we're going to create the holes, where we'll push in the staples to bind. you can be as precise as you like with this step; using a ruler to ensure that every staple is at an equal distance on every sheet, or just using the staples themselves as a measuring tool and eye-balling it. mark where the holes should go with a pencil. 3-4 staples along the crease should be enough.
- use a pushpin or awl to poke holes through each sheet. you can do this individually sheet-by-sheet, or use a binder clip to hold the sheets together and do them all at once.
- when all the holes are ready, align the holes of each sheet and press the staples through. feed the staples through the holes from the backs of the sheets, so that the prongs of the staple are on the inside of the crease. (the flat backs of the staples will be on the spine of your zine.)
- when staples are through all the sheets, use the blunt edge of a butter knife of a bone folder to fold down the prongs of each staple.
- fold the zine, and use the blunt edge on the spine crease a few times for good measure.
- optional: using a ruler and an x-acto knife, trim the uneven edges of the booklet.